

NEWS – CONGRESSMAN PETE STARK  
239 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-5065  
[www.stark.house.gov](http://www.stark.house.gov)

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Contact: Sarah Baldauf, (202) 225-3202

**STARK: “EVERY CHILD DESERVES A FAMILY”**  
*Reintroduces Legislation to Eliminate Discrimination  
in Foster Care and Adoption*

WASHINGTON – Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), ranking member on the Ways & Means Health Subcommittee, today reintroduced the “Every Child Deserves a Family Act,” H.R. 1681, with 33 original cosponsors. The legislation addresses the critical shortage of stable, safe and loving homes currently available to children in our foster care system. The legislation would set a federal baseline that puts an end to prejudiced restrictions that have denied an untold number of children the homes that they desperately need.

The Every Child Deserves a Family Act would ban discrimination in adoption or foster care placement based on the sexual orientation, marital status or gender identity of the potential parent, or the sexual orientation or gender identity of the child.

**Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA):** “We now spend more than \$7 billion per year on a flawed foster care system that doesn’t serve all the children who are in it, and permits discrimination against capable, loving potential parents and children. It’s time for a federal fix to this critical child welfare and civil rights issue. Every child deserves the lifelong benefits that come from growing up in a stable home.”

**Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA):** “The facts are clear: children fare far better in a safe, supportive, loving home. Just like straight parents, lesbian and gay parents can provide this, yet many states won’t allow it, while using federal funds to discriminate. This legislation simply says to states, ‘if you choose to use federal dollars, you can’t discriminate against prospective parents – or against these children.’ This is about common sense and fairness.”

Recent attempts have been made in states – including Virginia, Arizona and Illinois – to further restrict who can adopt, making the Every Child Deserves a Family Act particularly timely. The United States currently has an uneven system of state laws, a number of which put up barriers to becoming a foster or adoptive parent based on one’s sexual orientation, marital status or gender identity. A handful of states affirmatively allow gay men and lesbians to adopt jointly, while most states are silent on the issue. Stark’s legislation would correct the patchwork system in the best interests of the children involved.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) has announced her intention to introduce the bill in the Senate.

Congressman Stark announced reintroduction of the Every Child Deserves a Family Act at a press conference alongside two alumnae of the foster care system, child welfare experts, and family policy advocates including:

- David Hansell, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services
- Linda Spears, Vice President, Policy and Public Affairs for the Child Welfare League of America
- Jennifer Chrisler, Executive Director of the Family Equality Council
- Judith Sandalow, Executive Director for the Children’s Law Center
- Gary L. Flowers, Executive Director & CEO, Black Leadership Forum, Inc.
- Jody Huckaby, Executive Director of PFLAG National (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
- Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Jr., President of the Hip Hop Caucus

### **Endorsements of the Every Child Deserves a Family Act:**

“Far too many children in foster care have little hope for a permanent family and end up being parented by the government,” said Linda Spears, Vice President, Policy and Public Affairs for the Child Welfare League of America. “We must support all qualified adults who are interested in providing a nurturing, adoptive home—regardless of their marital status or sexual orientation. Having a real live, caring parent is incredibly important for ensuring a child’s success. Rep. Stark’s bill represents progress for these children whose goal is to simply be loved.”

“There is an undisputed child welfare crisis in this country, with more than 500,000 children in foster care and 120,000 of them available for adoption. It is time to pass the Every Child Deserves a Family Act to end this unconscionable problem,” said Jennifer Chrisler, Executive Director of the Family Equality Council. “One in four children in this country is being raised by a single parent, two million children are being raised in LGBT households. We all recognize there is no single type of family in America anymore. We must not allow anyone to use politically motivated and specious arguments about safeguarding traditional family structures to deny families to children in need.”

“We know that when youth are in loving homes with families to support them, a whole host of risk factors decrease – they are less likely to experience poverty, homelessness, incarceration, mental illness, and pregnancy,” said Jody Huckaby, Executive Director of PFLAG National (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). “Our organization has been supporting parents, families and children all over the country for over 35 years, and we know from our experience that it is in the best interest of every child – and, in fact, the right of every child – to have the loving care and support of a family.”

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